



Australian Government

Department of Health
Office of the Gene Technology Regulator

Stakeholder engagement meeting 10 November 2016 Communiqué

Purpose

On 10 November 2016, the Gene Technology Regulator (the Regulator) held a stakeholder engagement meeting in Canberra, primarily for the purpose of engaging with non-government organisations (NGOs) interested in gene technology. The meeting provided an opportunity for the Regulator to give stakeholders accurate information about the gene technology regulatory scheme and to let NGOs raise any issues or concerns.

Attendance

Eight NGOs were invited with three accepting the invitation: Friends of the Earth Australia, Gene Ethics and FOODwatch (WA). Also in attendance were members and the Chair of the Gene Technology Ethics and Community Consultative Committee and staff from the Office of the Gene Technology Regulator (OGTR), the Australian Government Department of Health and the Australian Government Department of Agriculture and Water Resources.

Agenda

The agenda for the meeting included presentations from the OGTR on the gene technology regulatory scheme, the current technical review of the Gene Technology Regulations 2001 (the Regulations), and the OGTR's monitoring and compliance activities. These presentations have been published on the [OGTR website](#). A representative from the Department of Health also provided an update on the third review of the *Gene Technology Act 2000* (the Act). Following these information sessions, NGOs were invited to raise any issues or concerns for discussion.

Discussion topics

The discussions throughout the day were robust, professional and productive. Topics raised included:

- Biohacking and community science
- Do-it-yourself gene editing kits
- Weight of data, sources of data used by regulators, data gaps/uncertainty
- The theory of institutional corruption
- Segregation of GM and non-GM crops

- Regulation of gene technology in schools and engagement with teachers regarding their regulatory responsibilities
- Processes to review the Regulations and the Act, including public consultation
- Regulatory capture of new technologies¹ – current status and case-by-case approach, and possible options following the review of the Regulations
- Potential off-target effect of new technologies
- Gene Drives²
- Committee appointments and conflict of interest processes
- Application of the precautionary principle
- Australia's position regarding the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety
- OGTR's post release review activities including reporting adverse effects and reviewing risk assessment and risk management plans

Next steps

The OGTR has considered the issues raised and intends to publish some updated information on the OGTR website to increase clarity and transparency. GTECCC will review its work plan to identify areas of possible work the committee could undertake to address some of the issues raised at the meeting. Matters considered by GTECCC and resolutions agreed by the committee at meetings are published in [GTECCC Communiqués](#).

¹ New technologies that were discussed included: synthetic biology; oligo-directed mutagenesis; site-directed nuclease techniques; RNA interference; and breeding techniques producing null segregants.

² Gene drives are genetic elements that are favoured for inheritance. This results in gene drives spreading through populations at a greater rate than genes with standard Mendelian inheritance.